

VZCZCXYZ0001
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #1293/01 1090848
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190848Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7396
INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0491
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 7247
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0570
RHFMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY
RHFMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHFMFISS/COMUSKOREA J3 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHFMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHFMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001293

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2014
TAGS: PREL PARM KS CH
SUBJECT: PRC DEFENSE MINISTER'S HIGH-PROFILE VISIT

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a high-profile visit to Korea, PRC Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan discussed bilateral defense ties, cooperation on North Korea, and economic development with President Roh and Defense Minister Yoon. Cao advocated enhancing military exchanges and asked for invitations for the Chinese military to observe military exercises on the Peninsula. The ROK MinDef proposed a hotline between the two defense ministries, joint search and rescue exercises, and regularizing Defense Ministerials. On North Korea, ROK officials urged Beijing to persuade Pyongyang to return to the Six Party Talks and to convey the ROK's concerns about the North Korean military's unhelpful attitude and behavior. While noting Pyongyang's inflexible approach, Cao suggested that the current impasse was caused by mistrust between the U.S. and North Korea and that the two countries needed to get together to develop trust. Expressing admiration for the ROK's economic growth, the PRC Defense Chief emphasized China's focus on economic development and the need to reduce economic polarization. Cao also reaffirmed Beijing's stance on Taiwan and expressed concerns about Japan's military expansion. The ROKG views the visit as very positive in all aspects, and expects enhanced military exchanges as a result of the discussions. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PRC Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan led a 19-member delegation (delegation list in para 13) to Korea April 15-19, the first visit by a Chinese defense chief in six years. The five-day visit started with a tour of Jeju Island and featured a 55-minute meeting with President Roh Moo-hyun, two sessions with Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung, and a breakfast meeting with senior National Assemblymen. Cao also visited the ROK Second Fleet in Pyongtaek and a Samsung factory, and was honored in a dinner hosted by the Federation of Korean Industries. Immediately following Cao's departure April 19 morning, MND Director General for International Defense Policy Kim Kyu-hyun gave PolMil Chief and DATT the following readout. DG Kim noted several times during the briefing that Minister Yoon personally had instructed him to give a full readout as soon as possible to ensure complete transparency between the ROK and the U.S.

CULTIVATING ROK-PRC MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

¶3. (C) In his meetings with both President Roh and MinDef Yoon, Cao stressed China's focus on trade and economic growth. Cao explained that the PRC's military budget for 2006 totaled USD 35 billion, to support a force of 2.3

million soldiers, excluding a separate budget for its space program. While some neighbors continued to have concerns about the Chinese military, Cao assured the ROK officials that China's priority was in developing its economy and that the PLA did not pose a threat to others in the region. DG Kim apparently told several members of Cao's delegation that China's neighbors would be reassured if China became more transparent and democratic.

¶4. (C) In the interest of enhancing military cooperation and relations between China and the ROK, Cao proposed increasing exchanges between the two militaries, especially among young officers, to learn about each other's militaries and to share views on issues of mutual interest. Cao also asked the ROK to extend an invitation for China to be an observer at ROK military exercises as part of confidence-building effort and for transparency, noting that China had been invited to observe Cobra Gold, a joint exercise held by Thailand and the U.S. The PRC Defense Minister did not specify which exercises China wanted to observe. (DG Kim told us that the ROK was not ready to invite the Chinese to ROK exercises or combined U.S.-ROK exercises, and that it would only consider changing this position in consultation with the U.S. In 2004, when a Chinese delegation visited the ROK, they were given briefings and a tour of the Korea Military Academy but were not allowed to actually observe any exercises.)

¶5. (C) Minister Yoon proposed three initiatives to enhance military-military ties: setting up a hotline between the two countries' naval and air forces to deal with contingencies in the West Sea; joint search and rescue exercises; regularization of Defense Ministerials between the two countries. In response, Cao said that the PRC does not have a hotline arrangement with any country and asked for more information. On joint search and rescue missions, Cao agreed in principle to pursue such activities as part of confidence-building measures. Without commenting directly on the proposal to regularize Defense Ministerials, Cao invited Yoon to visit China in 2007, which DG Kim interpreted as a tacit acceptance of Yoon's proposal.

¶6. (C) Reiterating a previous request, Yoon urged China to stop unlawful fishing activities in ROK territorial waters. Cao noted that he had earlier conveyed the ROK's concerns to appropriate ministries and would do so again, but that the matter was difficult to control.

COOPERATION ON NORTH KOREA

¶7. (C) During Cao's call on President Roh, the President noted that he and President Bush had agreed at their Gyeongju Summit to pursue a multilateral security framework to guarantee peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Roh also mentioned that the September 19 Six Party Joint Statement had included a reference to a regional security framework. Roh emphasized to Cao the important role China plays in the region and pressed the Chinese to persuade the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks as soon as possible. During their main meeting and later in a separate breakfast discussion, MinDef Yoon also conveyed the ROK's concerns about the present stalemate and expressed hope for progress in the Six Party process. Yoon emphasized the importance of Beijing's role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and criticized the North Korean military's unconstructive attitude and behavior. Noting that the DPRK military's propaganda made management of relations more difficult, Yoon urged Beijing to convey the ROK's concerns to the North Korean leadership.

¶8. (C) Cao said Beijing appreciated the ROK's active role in trying to resolve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. (DG Kim noted with interest that Cao referred to the problem as the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, not the DPRK nuclear issue.) Cao suggested that the current deadlock was caused by mistrust between the U.S. and the DPRK, and expressed hope that both sides would make more of an effort to develop trust. He reiterated that China wants stability

and peace, which is essential for China's economic development. In response to a question from Yoon, Cao said Kim Jong-il had not been accompanied by any senior military officials on his recent visit to China.

¶9. (C) On his April 4-6 visit to Pyongyang, Cao indicated that the DPRK military leadership was upset about the combined RSOI/Foal Eagle exercises and the BDA case. He noted that his North Korean interlocutors were very rigid and showed no flexibility on these topics. Cao met with Kim Yong-nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, Jo Myong-rok, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Army, and Kim Il-chol, Minister of the People's Armed Forces, but he did not get a meeting with Kim Jong-il. (DG Kim noted that it was highly unusual that a PRC Defense Chief did not get a meeting with Kim Jong-il.)

IMPORTANCE OF TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

¶10. (C) In his discussion with President Roh, Cao expressed admiration for the development of Jeju Island, particularly equitable development between urban and rural areas. China has an enormous task to bridge the gap between cities and rural areas, as well as the coastal and inner sections of China. Roh noted that the ROK also has economic polarization problems and expressed hope that China would learn a few lessons from the Korean experience. Cao described how far both countries had come since normalizing relations in 1992, with the two-way trade volume reaching USD 110 billion last year, three years earlier than had been projected.

JAPAN, TAIWAN, AND KOGURYO HISTORY

¶11. (C) In all of his meetings, the PRC Defense Minister emphasized the importance of the Taiwan issue to Beijing and thanked the ROK for its one China policy. Cao stated that China was fully committed to working to maintain peace. However, if Taiwan moved toward independence, China would do everything possible to counter any such move. Cao expressed serious concerns about Japan's military expansion and continued distortion of historical facts, as well as the repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by PM Koizumi. Neither side raised the latest ROK-Japan controversy over the disputed Liancourt Rocks. Roh asked for Beijing's assistance in taking appropriate measures to ensure that the Koguryo history is not distorted.

ATMOSPHERICS

¶12. (C) DG Kim said cordial and frank atmosphere prevailed throughout the visit. The ROKG was generally pleased with the meetings and expected positive results in terms of enhancing exchanges between the two militaries. At the same time, the ROKG continued to believe that ROK-PRC defense relations remain in a CBM stage in which the two militaries pursue initiatives such as joint search and rescue operations to boost confidence and trust in each other.

DELEGATION

¶13. (U) Cao was accompanied by:

Mrs. Li Pingzuan, Spouse
LTG. Jang Wanzuen, Shenyang Military Commander
MG. Zang Cinsung, Chef to the Chief of Staff
MG. Zang Yongyi, Deputy Commander, Navy
LTG. Rhyu Yazou, Deputy Member, Political Committee, Air Force
MG. Cao Wimin, DDG Administration, Defense Committee
MG. Jia Shaoning, DDG Foreign Affairs, Defense Ministry
Col. Mei Mingyou, DDG Security, Military Guard
Col. Wu Shaoyi, DDG Asian Affairs, Foreign Affairs Bureau, Defense Ministry
LTC. Zu Wonhao, Secretary to the Defense Minister
LTC. Kao Hongryun, Researcher, Administrative Bureau, Defense

Committee

Dr. Dung Shaojung, Doctor

Maj. Kuo Hongtao, Foreign Affairs Officer, Defense Ministry
(note taker)

Maj. Zao Dung, Foreign Affairs Officer, Defense Ministry
(note taker)

Maj. Zao Jamei, Foreign Affairs Officer, Defense Ministry
(protocol)

Cpt. Kao Shungli, Foreign Affairs Officer, Defense Ministry
(interpreter)

Cpt. Wang Sienching, Security Officer

Mr. Wang Chunsui, Cameraman, CCTV

VERSHBOW